

WHAT'S INSIDE?	Timeline: political expression at UTD	2	Meet your SG representatives	9	The Dallas Cowboys don’t deserve your viewership	11
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Fall 2025 starts off strong with major changes to university governance, enrollment shifts and a push for Division II

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

A new era for UTD is beginning. The start of the 2025-2026 academic year unveils a wave of campus transformations: cranes dot the horizon, Division II athletes take the field, the Academic Senate dissolves and the new president, Prabhas Moghe, starts his first year on campus.

Academics and Enrollment

This academic year will see major changes in how faculty are able to influence the university. Effective Sep. 1, UTD will no longer have an Academic Senate, which previously provided faculty perspectives on everything from ethics to research to police oversight and discipline. The dissolution is a result of Senate Bill 37 taking effect, which dis-

solves all faculty senates across all UT System schools unless the Board of Regents grants them explicit permission to continue existing; UTD’s senate does not have this permission. *The Retrograde* will share additional details about how faculty’s role at the school is changing after the Academic Senate’s final meeting Aug. 27.

Inga Musselman, vice president for

academic affairs and provost, said in a university-wide start of fall semester meeting that during academic year 2024-2025, UTD hired 55 new tenure-track faculty, with 50 new faculty starting this fall. UTD also added 26 new non-tenure track faculty. This is a notable increase to UTD’s academic staff which in 2023 numbered approximately 1,400.

Several new degrees and certifications

are set to launch this semester as well. ECS is unveiling bachelor’s degrees in materials science and systems engineering, while BAHT is releasing undergraduate degrees in communications and animation and games. Additionally, NSM now offers a master’s program in artificial intelligence for biomedical sciences.

SEE [CHANGES](#), PAGE 5

Meet Prabhas Moghe, UTD’s next president

The Rutgers administrator will bring decades of experience in biomedical research — and an uneasy record with faculty — to UTD

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Editor’s Note: Originally published on web May 23, 2025.

On Aug. 2, Prabhas Moghe formally took office, succeeding Richard Benson as president of UTD.

Moghe previously served as the executive vice president for academic affairs at Rutgers University in New Jersey. On May 7, the UT System Board of Regents named Moghe the sole finalist for UTD’s next president after an eight-month search to fill the position, which started with Benson’s Sep. 3 resignation announcement.

Moghe joined Rutgers as a biomedical engineering professor in 1995. During his time at Rutgers, he served in a number of executive roles, most recently serving as executive vice president for academic affairs. He has developed a vast research portfolio with 131 peer-reviewed journal publications, has filed for nine patents, and has co-written a textbook. He published four papers last year, and has spent the past few semesters teaching exclusively research classes. The major-

ity of his funding, which largely focuses on nanotechnology in the field of biomedicine, was awarded by the National Institute for Health and the National Science Foundation.

These very organizations have recently had millions in research funding stripped, with effects echoing throughout academia. While UTD’s research expenditures have nearly doubled under Benson’s leadership from \$98.6 million to \$180.2 million, the recent cuts represent “a loss of revenue in the tens of millions of dollars,” according to Benson’s comments in the April 16th Academic Senate meeting. As executive vice president for academic affairs, Moghe contributed towards a 41% increase in Rutgers’ research funding over the past five years.

While lauded for his research and contributions at Rutgers, Moghe has faced push-back from Rutgers faculty over controversial university policies. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rutgers instituted a hiring freeze for “part-time lecturers” because of a “dire” fiscal situation, effectively cutting 300 adjunct positions. Some faculty viewed Moghe as partially responsible for this decision, including Rutgers adjunct professor Howard Swerdloff, who described

SEE [MOGHE](#), PAGE 5

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY | COURTESY



UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

UTD cuts, reinstates track and cross country programs

The track and cross country teams were nixed, sparking outrage, and reinstated three days later

MUAAZ ABED
Staff Writer

On July 28, an email was sent to UTD athletes notifying them that the track and cross country programs would be discontinued into the foreseeable future. Three days later, former UTD president Richard Benson sent a notice to the affected athletes informing them that the programs would be reinstated for the 2025-2026 academic year.

In the July 28 email, Director of Athletics Angela Marin said the men’s and women’s indoor and outdoor

track and field and men’s and women’s cross country programs would be discontinued starting fall 2025 because of ongoing budget constraints and a lack of on-campus facilities. Nicholas Holland, a sophomore track and cross country athlete, said the decision to cut the programs came as a shock to the athletes.

“[Before] we got that email, we were thinking, ‘Okay, we’ve got three more weeks of summer training, we’re going to move back in, start really

SEE [CUTS](#), PAGE 5

TWO YEARS OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION AT UTD

NOVEMBER 2023

Student Affairs removed the Spirit Rocks for platforming "extended political discourse."



MAY 1, 2024

Pro-Palestinian Comets established a solidarity encampment with Gaza at the Chess Plaza.

Local police and state troopers stormed the "Gaza Liberation Plaza," dismantling the tents and barricades constructed throughout the day and arresting 21 students, community members, and faculty members. Protesters demanded the release of all arrestees overnight at Collin County Jail. All 21 arrestees were held overnight and released over the course of May 2.

APRIL 2024

After a seven-hour sit-in demonstration in the Administration Building, representatives from Students for Justice in Palestine initially agreed to a meeting with UTD's Cabinet of the President to discuss the concerns of Palestinian students. SJP refused the meeting because administration was also meeting with groups SJP considered Zionist, and delivered a letter to then-President Richard Benson instead.



JUNE 26, 2024

Recently graduated and among the 21 arrested, the former president of Students for Justice in Palestine was targeted and arrested by a state trooper in Denton County for allegedly violating his bond conditions after walking the stage and holding a Palestine flag with the statement "DIVEST FROM DEATH."

The aftermath of arresting 21 students, faculty, community members

Academic sanctions, anti-protest policies and legal battles filled the months following UTD's historic protest

MARIA SHAIKH
Managing Editor

As assistant art history professor Ali Asgar Alibhai exited the ATEC building on May 1, 2024, after a lecture, he did not expect to see a line of police bearing weapons and riot gear facing off against a crowd of student protesters in an encampment. As the cops advanced, Alibhai placed himself between them and the encampment, shouting to leave the students alone and that they were "just kids." A few minutes later, Alibhai was violently apprehended, handcuffed and arrested for criminal trespass along with two other professors, nine students and nine community members and alumni. Despite being arrested in Dallas County, the 21 arrestees were brought to Collin County Jail, a more conservative jurisdiction.

Police had destroyed and disbanded the encampment by the time they left with the "UTD 21." But for the 12 hours the student encampment existed, sprawling across Chess Plaza, it was peaceful and amicable. Students filtered in and out, faculty brought books and led teach-ins, students studied for finals and organizers supplied food and water for attendees. The overwhelming police response called in to disband the encampment — over 60 different officers from a confirmed five different departments including the Texas Department of Public Safety — was viewed by the UTD community as an unnecessary use of force. With 14 of the 21 arrestees indicted as of publication — meaning they will be prosecuted — and the subsequent arrests of three students who protested for Palestine at their graduations in the year since, political activism on campus has been chilled.

Since May 1, political activity and protest attendance at UTD has dropped sharply. UTD went from having monthly protests organized primarily by the Students for Justice in Palestine

chapter at UTD to more infrequent semesterly protests. The university has debuted more restrictive policies about what activities are permitted as part of free speech on campus, including a ban on tents and barricades and drawing with chalk on campus. State laws like SB 2972, which prohibits expressive activities between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., further contribute to the smothering effect. Organizations such as the Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression have given UTD's free speech and protest policies the lowest possible overall ranking in terms of how they protect civil liberties and enforce policy, and actions like the removal of the Spirit Rocks and mass firing of The Mercury prompted FIRE to publicly criticize UTD.

UTD's crackdown against pro-Palestine student protesters started in fall 2023 with the Oct. 7 increase in conflict between Israel and Hamas. Students took to painting the Spirit Rocks, three on-campus boulders traditionally painted to advertise different events and viewpoints, to voice their support for either Israel or Palestine starting in early October. On Oct. 16, after about a week of back-and-forth on the rocks, then-President Richard Benson sent out a schoolwide email commending UTD students for expressing their political views in a civil manner and expressing sympathy for the Israeli casualties in the war, without any mention of the Palestinian civilians killed up to that point.

A month later, the university removed the Spirit Rocks from campus on the first Monday of Thanksgiving break. The decision sparked condemnation from students and faculty alike, with some calling it an attack on campus free speech, as well as confusion over how the rocks' use, commendable one month ago, was now worthy of removing them from campus entirely. Since



the Spirit Rocks were brought to campus in 2008, the rocks had platformed an array of political messaging, from perspectives on international wars to slogans like "Black Lives Matter." As of publication, the Spirit Rocks have not been reinstated on campus.

Campus activism about the war continued after the rocks' removal, with some students painting dozens of small stones and scattering them in the grass where the Spirit Rocks once stood, as well as continued protests calling on UTD to divest from weapons manufacturers arming Israel, protest art drawn in chalk and poetry events. In March 2024, Student Government passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. Later that month, Gov. Greg Abbott signed executive order GA44, which calls upon schools to "combat antisemitism" on their campuses in response to the rise in "antisemitic vandalism" across Texas universities since Oct. 7.

According to the executive order's text, antisemitism includes phrases like "free Palestine" and "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," senti-

SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

ments such as Israel not having the right to exist and comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany. The bill's text singled out campus groups such as Students for Justice in Palestine — the primary student group organizing pro-Palestine activism at UTD — as eligible for punishment under these new rules. GA44 taking effect, however, did not quell campus protest activity. UTD's SJP chapter held an escalating series of protests in late April that culminated with a seven-hour sit-in at the Administration Building, after which UTD administration agreed to meet with student protesters about their demands for divestment. SJP ultimately rejected the offer because administration had also agreed to meet with student groups SJP considered Zionist. Following this rejection, student activists constructed an encampment in the early hours of May 1, falling in line with other 87 other pro-Palestine student encampments across the country such as those at Columbia, Yale and MIT.

At 3:45 p.m. May 1, a notice from UTD demanding that students dismantle the encampment was read out loud

2024 TO 2025



OCTOBER 2024

UTD's disciplinary panel dropped the sanctions against the nine students arrested, issuing written warnings instead.

APRIL 2025

14 of the 21 individuals arrested were officially indicted by a Collin County grand jury April 24 for obstruction of a passageway.

MAY 2025

A group of students walked out of the UTD graduation commencement while holding Palestinian flags and chanting for divestment. UTDPD disbanded the procession. In the aftermath, police arrested two of the organizers of the walk-out and banned two prominent SJP organizers, preventing them from entering campus — including their own graduations.

JULY 2024

The nine students arrested at UTD's May 1 "Gaza Liberation Plaza" encampment face academic and post-graduate challenges as UTD pursued denial of degree, deferred suspension procedures and academic and disciplinary hearings, which endanger the academic careers of the arrested students.

JUNE 2025

Senate Bill 2972, which restricts how students and employees of Texas' public universities can use their First Amendment rights on campus, was signed into law June 20 by Gov. Greg Abbott. The law will go into effect starting in fall 2025 semester. Under the new law, members of the public are no longer by default allowed to express themselves on public campuses, leaving it up to individual schools whether the public is allowed to partake in on-campus expression at all.

NOW

AUGUST 2025

Assistant professor of art history Ali Asgar Alibhai filed a federal civil rights lawsuit Aug. 3 against university officials and local law enforcement, claiming his constitutional rights were violated and he was discriminated against as a South Asian Muslim following his arrest in May 2024.

TIMELINE BY ANIKA SULTANA | GRAPHICS EDITOR

PHOTOS BY GREGORY BINU AND SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

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ANIKA SULTANA | RETROGRADE STAFF

by one of the encampment organizers, but the protest did not stop. By 4 p.m., law enforcement approached the Chess Plaza and began dismantling the encampment and making arrests. At 8:42 p.m. UTD sent out a schoolwide email stating the encampment was not permitted on campus because it obstructed walkways and violated institutional rules. However, in an op-ed for D Magazine, history professor Ben Wright — one of the professors arrested — wrote that walking around the encampment did not take more than 30 additional seconds.

The 21 arrested were held in jail until the following day; Alibhai was the first released at 11 a.m. May 2. As a condition of their release, all of the students and faculty arrested were only permitted on campus for class or teaching-related duties as part of their bond conditions. Later that month, UTDPD issued a warrant for the arrest of one of the "UTD 21" students when he attended his own graduation and displayed a Palestine flag, something his lawyer had told him was permissible under his bond.

Over the summer, all nine arrested students underwent disciplinary hearings and faced academic sanctions including deferred suspension and denial of degree. Deferred suspension means that if a student were to break another rule on campus, they would be suspended from their classes. Denial of degree refers to a period of time wherein UTD would deny that a graduated student possesses a UTD degree if an in-

terviewer or employer called the school to verify the diploma. A spokesperson for UTD gave the following statement to *The Mercury*, UTD's former student newspaper:

"Individuals who participated in the May 1 encampment at UTD were not arrested for protesting. They were arrested for criminal trespass after failing to comply with requests that they remove the barricaded encampment erected in the pre-dawn hours of May 1."

The academic sanctions against the nine students were all dropped by Oct. 14 that year.

“The overwhelming police response called in to disband the encampment was viewed by the UTD community as an unnecessary use of force.”

According to public records obtained by The Retrograde, campus administrators made changes to the guidelines governing how students can demonstrate on campus in the days after the May 1 encampment arrests. Dean of Students Amanda Smith emailed a list

of guidelines related to UTDSP5001, UTD's policy on speech, expression and assembly, to SJP members that she claimed to have also sent them in October. The guidelines sent in October did not include specific language banning chalk and encampment-style structures, which the new guidelines sent in May did include. A UTD spokesperson provided the following statement to The Retrograde:

"While the two documents are not identical, the intent of the changes to the May 3 document was to provide further information on university policies governing speech and assembly. There were no changes to the policy between October and May. We are happy to meet with students if they have questions or concerns or if they want additional information on policies and procedures."

Neither the October nor May guidelines are publicly available as part of UTDSP5001. Since the May guidelines were shared with SJP, other student organizations have erected tents and used chalk on campus without administrative pushback.

Student activists continued protesting for Palestine throughout fall 2024, seeing a much smaller turnout than the previous semester. The most notable protest that fall was when UTD students joined over 1,000 total protesters outside the Dallas Hilton Anatole Nov. 16 to oppose it hosting the annual Global Conference for Israel. The largest protest since the May 1 arrests came nearly a full year later in mid-March in support of Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia student and Palestine activist arrested by ICE earlier that month, with about 100 total attendees.

On April 24 this year, Collin County officially indicted 14 of the "UTD 21" for obstruction of a passageway. The remaining seven were no-billed, meaning a grand jury did not find enough evidence to suspect they had committed a crime. The remaining seven are not currently being prosecuted, but could potentially be indicted for the charges they were arrested for by a different grand jury in the future. And on May 16, another graduate was arrested for protesting for Palestine at his graduation.

The events of May 1 drew immediate uproar from across the UTD communi-

ty and local organizations alike. Within days of the encampment, emergency statements were put out by the Student Government, emergency meetings were held by the Academic Senate, 1,470 alumni signed a petition calling for the release of the students and hundreds of faculty did likewise. Public records obtained by The Retrograde show that then-Speaker of the Academic Senate, Ravi Prakash, attempted to mass circulate his petition to faculty before UTD administration prevented his email from being sent.

A lawsuit against the university has been filed by Alibhai, who claimed his arrest and the aftermath thereof was discriminatory and violated his constitutional rights. Coverage of the university's response to the encampment by *The Mercury* led to administrative crackdowns against the student paper, culminating in a mass strike last September and the formation of The Retrograde as an independent student publication.

Protest activity during the fall 2025 semester will likely be impacted by SB 2972, which goes into effect once the semester starts. The law requires schools to amend their speech, expression and assembly policies to comply with several new restrictions, such as bans on any "expressive activities" between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m., using sound-amplifying devices like megaphones during class hours that "interfere with campus operations" or occur during the last two weeks of the semester, or wearing a face covering to avoid identification or prevent law enforcement from doing their jobs. Additionally, the law no longer allows members of the public unaffiliated with a university to express themselves in public campus locations such as UTD's Plinth.

The Retrograde *will continue to provide regular coverage on campus events and major changes as the year continues.*



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Construction Blotter

Student Success Center/Student Union

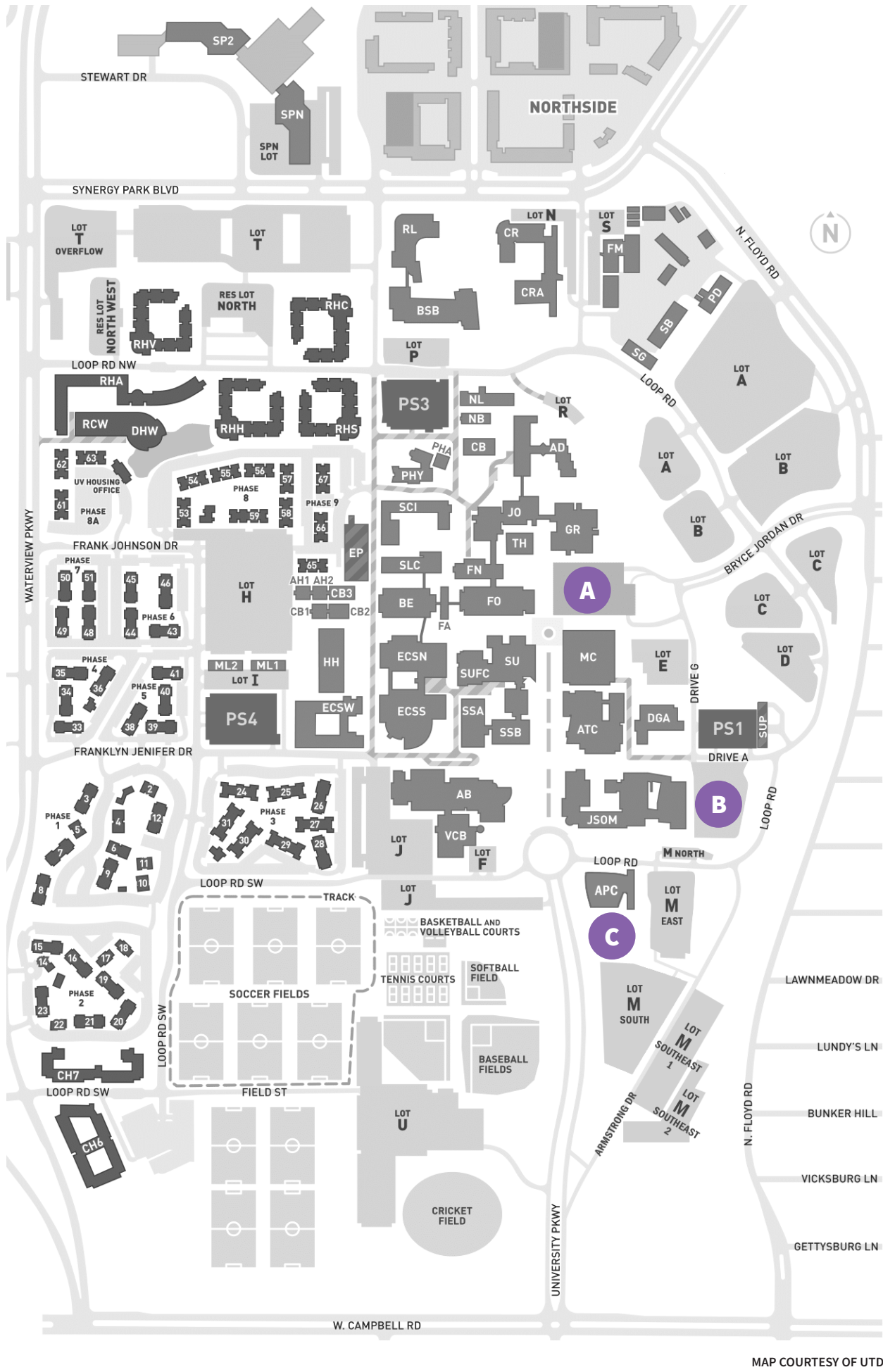
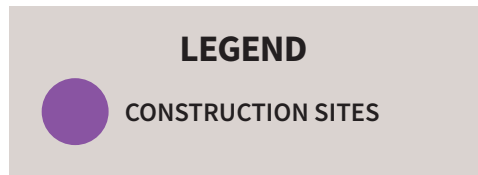
The Student Union/Student Success Center is a 360,000 square-foot facility which when completed will house a new student union, a 400-seat lecture hall, a ballroom and new offices for the Honors College, Student Success Center, Office of Undergraduate Education and more. The SU/SSC will include 10 reservable meeting rooms, various group study rooms, dedicated dance spaces and lounge seating both inside and outside of the structure. The SU/SSC will be the largest building on campus.

JSOM

Construction on the third JSOM building is expected to finish by late spring 2026. The new JSOM addition, JSOM III, will add over 125,000 square-feet of space meant to house the large undergraduate population of the business school and its various executive education programs. In addition to expanded classroom and study space, JSOM III will be home to the new office for the dean and an artificial intelligence lab.

Athenaeum

Phase II of the Athenaeum, the 56,000 square foot performance hall, is expected to open in fall 2026. The performance hall will be able to seat 680 guests, and the building will include an additional 12,000 square-feet of outdoor space, practice rooms and choral/orchestral rehearsal rooms. The performance hall is the second phase in the three-phase Athenaeum complex. The first phase, which houses the Crow Museum of Asian Art, opened fall 2024. The third phase will include a second museum dedicated to the art of the Americas and a parking garage for over 1,100 cars. Phase III has not broken ground yet. In total, the 12-acre Athenaeum district is expected to cost \$158 million.



MAP COURTESY OF UTD

UTD professor files lawsuit against university, local law enforcement over 2024 arrest, discrimination

The suit alleges that UTD violated Ali Asgar Alibhai's constitutional rights following his arrest during the May 1, 2024 pro-Palestine encampment

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Editor's Note: Originally published on web August 4, 2025.

Assistant professor of art history Ali Asgar Alibhai filed a federal civil rights lawsuit Aug. 3 against university officials and local law enforcement, claiming his constitutional rights were violated and he was discriminated against as a South Asian Muslim following his arrest in May last year.

The arrest occurred during law enforcement's raid of the "Gaza Liberation Plaza" student encampment constructed on UTD's campus May 1. In the suit, Alibhai states that as he was walking across campus, he saw peaceful students facing off against a militarized police force. The legal case covers Alibhai's arrest and the alleged retaliation and discrimination he suffered during the following year, as well as previous experiences of discrimination on campus.

Coverage of the encampment by former student newspaper The Mercury reported law enforcement brought assault rifles, shotguns and grenade launchers to stop the protest and arrested 21 individuals. In April this year, a Collin County grand jury no-billed the charges of trespass UTD held against Alibhai, meaning he will not be prosecuted for any crime. Fourteen other individuals from the 21 arrestees were indicted and are currently facing charges for obstruction of a passageway.

The suit states Alibhai asked the officers to remain calm and repeated the phrase "they are just kids." Moments after he began to speak, Alibhai was arrested by members of the Collin County Sheriff's department, UTDPD and Texas State Troopers. Alibhai said that at no point did he threaten or obstruct the officers. In an Aug. 4 press release, Justin Moore, lead attorney on the lawsuit, said Alibhai was "violently arrested without warning, without a dispersal order and without probable cause."

Alibhai said that after his arrest, he was forced into inhumane conditions while awaiting transport to Collin County Jail and was threatened and lacerated by officers while in custody.

Former UTD president Richard Benson is named as one of the defendants in the case for his oversight of the campus and its actions on May 1,

as well as statements he made in a Dallas Morning News op-ed and in Academic Senate meetings following the arrests, which Alibhai alleges amount to defamation and libel.

BAHT dean Nils Roemer and Provost Inga Musselman are also named as defendants for allegedly restricting Alibhai's employment and academic opportunities through how they treated him post-arrest. Alibhai, who has been a UTD professor since 2019 and a tenure-track professor since fall 2022, said he has been denied full participation in the academic life of the university and remains under an informal sanction because of Roemer's and Musselman's restrictions.

The suit also states that Alibhai's experience has been more restrictive and punitive than that of his white colleagues who were also arrested May 1, amounting to discrimination against his South Asian and Muslim identities.

The suit presents eight counts against UTD for the violation of Alibhai's constitutional rights, retaliation and disparate discriminatory treatment against him under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and his unlawful and excessive arrest. Alibhai is seeking compensatory damages for mental anguish, back pay and attorney fees.

The Retrograde reached out to UTD for comment on the case. An official spokesperson provided the following statement: "Dr. Ali Asgar H. Alibhai is currently employed as an assistant professor at UT Dallas. However, the University has not been notified of a lawsuit at this time."

"This is not just about a single arrest," Moore said. "It's about an institution using its power to silence dissent and marginalize those it finds inconvenient."

The full 27 page lawsuit filed Aug. 3, 2025, can be found on The Retrograde's website. This is an ongoing story, The Retrograde will continue providing updates on developments to this case and other litigation brought against UTD.



PHOTOS BY SURJADITYA SARKAR AND ANIKA SULTANA | RETROGRADE STAFF

Office of Facilities and Economic Development provides update on Silver Line

DART predicts the line will be operable by the end of 2025, connecting UTD students to the DFW airport and downtown Dallas by train



ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Since mid-2024, Dallas Area Rapid Transit has been conducting test runs for its Silver Line train. Representatives of the Office of Facilities and Economic Development said UTD expected the line would be operable by late 2025 to mid 2026.

The Silver line will connect UTD students to the DFW International Airport and the rest of the DART train system, with connections to the Red and Orange lines at the City-Line/Bush station, to the Green line at the Downtown Carrollton station and the Orange line and Terry Metro at the DFW airport stations.

The line’s UTD station is located on its eastern end, and DART estimates that it would take Comets taking the Silver line from UTD 44 minutes to reach the DFW Airport Terminal B station and 15 minutes to reach the Shiloh Road Station in Plano. UTD’s station, located north of Synergy Park Boulevard, will have

over 200 free parking spaces a projected daily ridership of 1,205 by 2040.

The total cost of the Silver Line project is \$2.098 billion. It will also include a hiking and biking trail which will run alongside the 26 miles of the Silver line. The Cotton Belt Regional Trail is expected to com-

plete Phase 2 of the trail, which runs through the UTD station, by 2027.

MOGHE
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

it as a “thoughtless and callous decision that harmed this university, its students, and teachers.” The hiring freeze was later lifted.

Later, when Moghe was promoted to executive vice chancellor for research and academic affairs, the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union asked for compensation for the extra work they had performed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the work of switching to a remote-learning format and teaching larger classes. Moghe sidestepped the issues in his reply.

This back-and-forth culminated in an April 2023 strike across all three Rutgers campuses, which lasted four days before a tentative framework with improved salaries and job security was proposed. Around 9,000 staff participated in the strike, with unions representing adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, graduate workers, postdoctoral researchers, counselors and faculty in the biomedical and health sciences department. Despite the gains, adjuncts have continued to face layoffs.

If appointed, Moghe will inherit the UTD presidency while many are trying to step away. Since Benson announced plans to step down from the presidency in August 2024, other prominent UT System figures such as UT Austin President Jay Hertzell and UT System Chancellor James Milliken have announced their departures for Southern Methodist University and the University of California System, respectively.

These departures reflect an especially con-

tentious moment for education in the nation as a whole and Texas in particular. The proposal of Senate Bill 37, which threatens to limit the teaching of history, race and other subjects that discuss systemic inequities, could hamper Texas universities’ freedom to teach their own curriculums. Senate Bill 17, which was passed in 2023, has resulted in the prohibition of DEI offices and training and silencing of student expression.

UTD’s current dearth of DEI offerings stand in stark contrast to Rutgers’, which currently maintains an office of equity and inclusion. Rutgers is one of 45 schools — alongside Texas schools Rice University and the University of North Texas — under investigation by the Trump administration for partnering with The PhD Project, a non-profit that helps students from underrepresented backgrounds earn business PhDs. It is also one of 60 schools being investigated for antisemitism after pro-Palestine protests in spring 2024.

Moghe was at the helm of a number of DEI initiatives at Rutgers. In 2021 he charged a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access Planning Committee to create a plan to meaningfully champion DEI initiatives at the university. He also oversaw diversity funding allocated for Rutgers’ hiring and co-authored a letter to his faculty advocating for a “self-reinforcing academic community that is committed to diversity and inclusive excellence.” Given current Texas restrictions, it is currently unclear how Moghe’s past experience with DEI initiatives will apply to UTD.

CUTS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

building as a team and getting ready for our first race.” Holland said. “That’s all anybody’s mind was on. No one had even a thought that the program might not exist ... It’s just one of those things that you don’t expect to happen until it does.”

The email further explained that all athletic scholarships the track and cross country athletes had been offered would still be awarded for the 2025-2026 academic year. In addition, UTD would assist any student athletes looking to transfer to other schools with track or cross country programs.

Following the cut, 66 student athletes across both programs were no longer able to compete for UTD, many of whom were specifically recruited by UTD for their athletic prowess. The late notice also made it difficult for student athletes to transfer to other programs if they wished to compete in the fall 2025 semester. The coaching staff hired for the track and cross country teams were also set to lose their jobs.

The decision to axe the programs just weeks before classes began caused an uproar among athletes, athletes’ families and alumni who had been on the teams. Business analytics alum John Joseph-Youssef, a

former UTD track and cross country athlete, started a petition to demand UTD reinstate the cut programs that garnered over 2,500 signatures within days of being proposed. Joseph-Youssef said he made the petition to aid the student athletes as they faced an enormous roadblock in their athletic careers.

“A lot of [the student athletes] have had to enter the transfer portal to try to find a new home,” Joseph-Youssef said. “Realistically, they’re not gonna find one. They’re stuck at UTD for the fall at least ... They’re gonna have to explain to coaches why they haven’t put up any performances for a certain gap of time, and it makes their case a lot harder ... I felt like I had to give back [to the team] in some form, through petitions, [because] you never know if they’re even gonna do anything.”

On July 31, Benson sent an email to the affected athletes announcing the programs’ reinstatement, allowing the athletes to compete during the 2025-2026 academic year again. Benson said the decision was reversed because of the community response and feedback from the UT System administration. Holland said UTD’s handling of the situation made it appear like the decision to cut the programs was made hastily.

“I’m not quite sure what they ex-

pected the response [to cutting the programs] to be,” Holland said. “They cut the program on Monday, and they got so much backlash that they turned around and reinstated the program that Thursday. It almost makes it seem like they didn’t completely think it through.”

Despite the reinstatement of the programs, track and cross country athletes have not yet regained confidence in UTD Athletics. The programs were only explicitly reinstated for the 2025-2026 academic year, leaving the future of the programs uncertain. As a result, many athletes are planning to transfer out of UTD in search of universities with more stable track and cross country programs. Holland said that even though he and many others on the teams plan on transferring out, the athletes intend to make the most out of the upcoming season.

“[The upcoming athletic season] is going to be very interesting,” Holland said. “I think that once we get together as a team and begin to train again, we will begin to put the pieces back together and enjoy what we have left, but for many of us this year is simply a year to build our athletic resume to transfer.”

CHANGES
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

After two consecutive years of decreased enrollment, preliminary estimates from the Office of Admission and Enrollment expect a 2% increase in total enrollment at UTD, which amounts to approximately 671 more students. New student enrollment in fall 2025 was 15% greater than fall 2024; however, continuing student enrollment decreased by 2%. Graduate student enrollment is now in its third consecutive year of decline after peaking in 2022. UTD’s enrollment decline is mainly caused by a steep decrease in international students joining the school. According to Josephine Vittta, senior director of UTD’s international center, nearly 1,500 international students enrolled in fall 2024, but only about 500 joined in fall 2025. Vittta said that based on how often visas are issued, UTD could expect approximately 150 more students by census day, July 32 [or whenever census day is. Say the day].

“In addition to revenue impacts, anticipate impacts on our campus workforce,” Vittta said, regarding the steep enrollment decline.

Construction and Facilities

On Aug. 12 last year, UTD broke ground

on the Student Union and Student Success Center complex, also known as “Big Momma.” Today, towering construction cranes surround the site, which according to SpawGlass, the construction firm behind the project, now sports a building that can stand on its own and completed steel decking for what will become UTD’s 12,500 square-foot ballroom.

The SU/SSC is on track to complete construction in late 2026, according to UTD. SpawGlass said the next steps for the project include adding exterior walls and a concrete facade to the building.

JSOM continues to grow as well, as work continues on the 125,000-square-foot expansion known as JSOM III to add what JSOM dean Hasan Pirkul has said is much-needed space. In spring 2025, JSOM was home to a combined total of 9,356 students, which Pirkul said were a challenge to fit into JSOM’s 51 current classrooms.

“Believe me, we cannot wait to occupy our new building,” Pirkul said in a statement to UTD. “During the past two years, we have been truly struggling to find offices for our new faculty and staff.”

UTD celebrated the opening of its art museum and the first phase of the Athenaeum in fall 2024. The second phase of

this \$158 million project, a 680-seat performance hall with attached music and rehearsal rooms, is on track to open in fall 2026. The main structure of the performance hall

“ ECS is unveiling bachelor’s degrees in materials science and systems engineering, while BAHT is releasing undergraduate degrees in communications and animation and games.”

has now been completed. The Athenaeum plan also includes another museum for “the traditional arts of the Americas,” which will be Phase III of the project, and eventually a parking garage for 1,100 cars. As of publica-

tion, construction has not begun on Phase III or the parking garage.

UTD also bought one of the neighboring buildings on Waterview over the summer. The Waterview Academic and Administrative Center, formerly home to the tech-firm Concentrix, was valued at \$8.3 million during the previous tax season. *The Retrograde* reached out to UTD for comment on the cost of the acquisition and plans for the new building. A spokesperson for UTD said the university could not provide comment as to what will go inside the new five-story building. UTD did not provide comment on the cost or timeline for WAAC’s opening.

Calvin Jamison, vice president of facilities and economic development, said during the Facilities Committee’s spring 2025 meeting that with the completion of UTD’s current construction projects, campus utilities like electricity would be nearly at their limit. Jamison said that a new central utilities plant will need to be built north of campus to support continued growth.

Athletics

UTD petitioned to join the NCAA’s Lone Star Division II conference in 2023 and was accepted in 2024 in the form of a two-year provisional period. The provisional period means UTD athletes can compete in

the DII conference but are not eligible to win any awards idk how the fuck this works gog help. The Comets are set to become full members of the Lone Star Conference by fall 2026.

As part of this transition, Vice President of Student Affairs Gene Fitch said that an additional \$3 million would be added UTD Athletics’ annual budget to cover new expenditures.

Associate Athletics Director Bill Pettitt said that in May this year, UTD reached an agreement with footwear company New Balance to provide apparel for UTD’s teams. Pettitt also said UTD paid for ads, in New York City’s Times Square, which can be seen on the UTD Athletics Instagram page.

This is part of a series on changes at UTD. Follow The Retrograde through our print issue or online at retrogradenews.com to keep up with latest stories.



UTD rescinds preferred name, pronouns policy

The registrar’s office will no longer be required to collect student demographics, including preferred names or pronouns

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

On July 24, UTD rescinded UT-DPP1115, the policy dealing with students’ preferred names and pronouns.

Before its revocation, UTDPP1115 stated that “faculty, staff, and students are expected to use a student’s affirmed name and are encouraged to use their gender identity and affirmed pronouns” and that “UT Dallas [is] to be a campus at which students are treated with fairness as they pursue their education.” It also allowed the registrar’s office to collect

affirmed details from all students, which includes preferred name and pronouns. Now, the policy website reads “Policy Rescinded.” UTDPP1115 began with a statement which read “UT Dallas is committed to integrating the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into every level of our organization and operations.” Its removal comes as a consequence of the 88 legislature’s SB 17 which banned diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Michael Kesden, Academic Senate speaker and physics professor, suggested in April that UTD temporarily revoke UTDPP1115, cit-

ing university attorney Tim Shaw’s recommendation. At the July Academic Senate meeting, several attendees said the senate disbanding — a possibility under Senate Bill 37, which takes effect Sept. 1 — could jeopardize the creation of adaptation measures or support guidelines for students that would take the place of a rescinded UTDPP1115.

The UTD Atlas Service Portal still hosts instructions on how students can modify their “gender identity” or pronouns, with the school and Galaxy still allows students to make such modifications. For changes to preferred names, students can email the

registrar’s office. Without UTDPP1115, the registrar’s office is no longer required to collect this information. There has not been any public indication as to whether the registrar’s office will continue allowing students this option to register their preferred name or pronouns with the university. c.

Rescinding policies related to diversity initiatives is not new. On Feb. 6, 2024, UTDPP1022, the policy regarding UTD’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access standing committee, was rescinded in a similar manner after a year of being under revision. Both UTDPP1115 and UTDPP1022 dis-

played the subhead “this policy is impacted by Texas Education Code 51.5325 and is currently under revision” prior to revocation. The education code in question prohibits universities from maintaining diversity, equity and inclusion offices or initiatives. It does not prohibit universities from collecting data on students’ names, gender identities or pronouns.

This news brief is part of “The Retrograde’s ongoing coverage of campus policy changes. Follow The Retrograde through its print issue or online at retrogradenews.com to keep up with latest stories.

Power shifts and policy overhauls: UTD’s year of structural transformation

With NCAA ambitions and \$158 million museum complex, UTD builds policy framework for its growing footprint while under increased scrutiny

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

The past year has been full of changes to university policy, both in response to internal administrative action and new legislation passed by Texas. Since May this year, UTD has made six major policy updates, created five new policies and entirely retracted one policy covering everything from the university’s endowment, university governance, public art and excused absences.

New Policy

The elimination of the Academic Senate effective Sep. 1, UTD’s transition into NCAA Division II and the completion of UTD’s \$158 million art museum have all sparked new questions that university policy is now attempting to address.

UTDPP1127 is a policy that establishes a new committee in the Academic Senate tasked with making recommendations to UTD about how to improve promotion paths, contract lengths, workload, development opportunities and participation in shared governance for non-tenure track faculty. However, the policy is set to expire Sep. 1 because the Academic Senate will not continue exist-

ing past that date unless approved by the UT System Board of Regents in compliance with SB 37. As of publication, the board has not approved any faculty senates within UT System schools.

Faculty senates are administrative bodies composed of university faculty that helps create, review and revise policy while serving on various university-wide committees. As of publication, UTD has not announced a plan for dealing with the end of the Academic Senate or how its duties will be redistributed.

UTDPP1126 establishes a university-wide Public Art Collection Committee entirely independent of the Academic Senate. Its membership is appointed by the university president and must include a practicing visual artist from the Bass school in addition to faculty, staff and students. The committee will develop and publish guidelines for the acquisition, installation, maintenance and management of UTD’s public art collection. The committee will also help develop a registry of all of UTD’s public art while establishing a definition for what counts as public spaces for art on campus. As of publication, no timeline has been given as to when

new public art guidelines will go into effect.

Two policies have been developed to support UTD’s growing collegiate sport department. UTDPP1125 creates another university-wide standing committee independent of the Academic Senate whose focus is to recommend policy that assists the operation of UTD’s athletics programs, review and approve sports schedules, serve as a liaison between athletics and academic departments, focus on student retention and NCAA compliance, while also dealing with compliance issues that affect athletics and reviewing the finances of athletics. The seventeen member committee will include four students, two of whom will be student-athletes: one of each based on binary gender. UTDSP5018 creates the framework for official excused absences for university sanctioned events. While primarily focused on student-athlete conference travel, the new policy allows for excused absences for all university-sanctioned activity. The Vice Provost for Academic Success and Innovation, which as of June 2025 is a vacant position, will oversee the sanctioned absences.

Updated Policy

The vast majority of this wave of

policy updates focused on minor syntax changes and updates made to make the de jure operation of UTD align with the policy that governs the university. The updated policy also included the removal of additional language that mentioned diversity, a still lingering effect of the 88 legislature’s SB 17. The Retrograde used the Wayback Machine to access the previous version of each policy.

UTDPP1096 which outlines the goals of UTD and the roles of the highest levels of administration, was the most extensively updated piece of UTD policy over the summer with key changes in reference to how many vice-presidents and deans exist. Since UTD has ten vice-presidents, the policy was updated to state this— it had previously only considered nine vice presidents. Every mention of eight deans is brought down to seven to match the current number of UTD deans. The specific role of the Vice President and Chief of Staff has now been formalized and placed into university policy. And any mention of the former UT system policy UTS187 has been removed, specifically in reference to no longer requiring diverse presidential searches.

UTDPP1062 gives the Honors Col-

lege complete oversight over the hiring and evaluation of faculty not in the tenure system, a role that had been previously held by the deans of each respective school.

UTDPP1122 now allows the public to see the evaluation questions used by UTD to evaluate non-academic administrators.

UTDPP1023, which refers to the standing Committee on Educational Policy, now includes an institutional accreditation liaison as a non-voting member of the committee.

UTD’s endowment policy, UT-DBP3034, now includes a “miscellaneous” category for endowments instead of a programs category. Endowment programs are now included under the miscellaneous label. UTD’s examples of what is miscellaneous is limited to the following: “programs, etc.”

This is a developing story. The Retrograde will provide further coverage as university policy is updated or rescinded after the elimination of the Academic Senate.

How Texas’ redistricting battle affects UTD

With Republicans in the Texas legislature aiming to flip multiple Democratic seats red, DFW is becoming a battleground

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Texas’ mid-decade redistricting attempt could redraw significant parts of DFW’s current districts, potentially flipping a seat from Democrat to Republican in one of the districts covering UTD.

The effort to redistrict the state began on XX Date as part of Gov. Greg Abbott’s special legislative session’s agenda. Amid consistent criticism, such as unanimous disapproval of the redistricting plans by attendees at a UT Arlington hearing and Democratic representatives leaving the state to prevent voting on the issue, the issue is among Texas’ most controversial this year.

Texas’ districts are currently drawn according to the PLANS2193 map. According to this map, UTD is split between Congressional District 4 in the northern half and 32 in the south, with District 24 beginning just south of Campbell Road. District 4 is a Republican seat currently held by Pat Fallon, while District 32 is Democratic under Julie Johnson.

The redistricting plan advanced by the Texas Senate, PLANC2308, would create five new Republican seats and change the boundaries and demographics of all three campus districts. UTD would remain bisected by districts 4 and 32, but District 4’s Anglo population would increase, accounting for over 60% of its voting population and cementing it as redder than before. District 32 would turn from a Democratic district to favoring Republicans by seven points — a 17.7-point jump from the current map — according to data collected by the Texas Tribune. And District 24’s boundary would no longer start at Campbell Road.

At UTD, political student organiza-

tions are speaking out against the proposed changes.

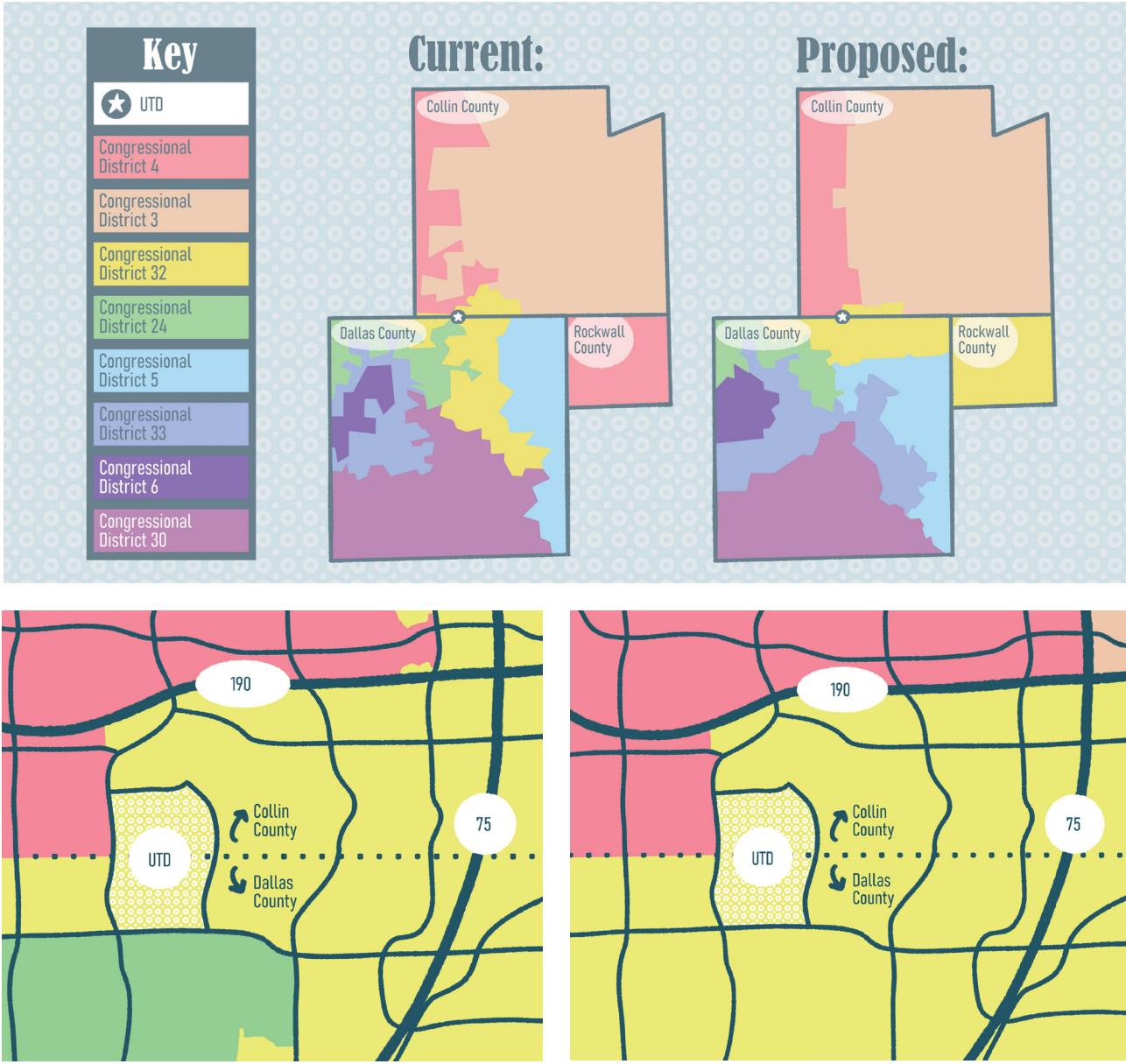
Political science and psychology junior Sarah Hayes is president of Texas Rising, a political organization focusing on civic engagement and progressive policy. She said the proposed changes amount to racial gerrymandering and voter suppression.

“It’s very clear that the political motivations for this come from the White House,” Hayes said. “They come from the Trump administration trying to secure even stronger majorities in the states they want in order to secure the future of their party, and they’re doing so in a way that dilutes the vote of specific types of typically marginalized voters.”

Texas is no stranger to controversial redistricting. Since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, Texas has been challenged on the legality of its district maps every single decade. The challenge to the 2010 maps has not been resolved in court. Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, told the Tribune that when legislators first presented new district maps for the current redistricting efforts, they claimed they were in accordance with the law. Now, some map proposals have been discarded for being “discriminatory against white people.” MALDEF is part of the ongoing legal challenge to Texas’ redistricting efforts.

“They contended that what they drew was completely satisfactory, so now that they are acquiescing in some concocted allegation of illegality from the Trump administration is astounding,” Saenz said.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.



GRAPHICS BY RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Bottom left: UTD’s position in the current district plan. Bottom right: UTD’s position in the proposed redistricting plan, referencing plan C-2308.

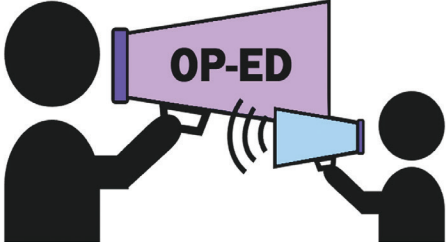
08.25 Crossword

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	4				5	
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TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

- Across
- 1 60-minutes: abbr.
4 Spanish "good"
6 The world has seven of these
8 Decay
9 Leading role of a newspaper: abbr.
10 Said "I have the high ground" and "Use the Force, Luke"
11 Onion routing
12 French "no"
13 Northeast Ohio airport
14 Nickname for The Retrograde's (9A)
15 To chop wood
- Down
- 1 Good Will _____; genius-janitor movie
2 A primary color
3 Dr. Seuss's star-bellied creature
4 Kiddo's injury
5 Baltimore's baseball team
6 Not right
7 Not a nail

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The Retrograde publishes op-ed submissions in an effort to reflect a wide variety of campus perspectives. Topics or the opinion reflected in the op-ed should be relevant to a college or local audience. Apart from your name and photo, personal info will not be published. *The Retrograde* reserves the right to reject any submission and to edit op-eds for clarity, brevity, accuracy and to prevent libel. Email op-eds to theretrogradenews@gmail.com.

08/25 KenKen

Instructions: Your goal is to fill up the 6×6 grid with numbers 1-6. Each column and row must have exactly one of each number, just like in sudoku. Each box (an area outlined with thick black lines) has a target number and a mathematical operation listed in the top-left corner. The numbers within the box must result in the target number when the mathematical operation is employed. For example, a box with 3+ could be satisfied with 1 and 2, as 1+2=3. Similarly, a box with 2÷ could be satisfied with either (1,2) or (2,4), as 2÷1=2 and 4÷2=2. Visit our website for a full walkthrough.

96×		3-		15×	
	6+		36×		
1-		2÷	1-		1-
	17+			12+	
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		4÷			

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Example of a complete KenKen:

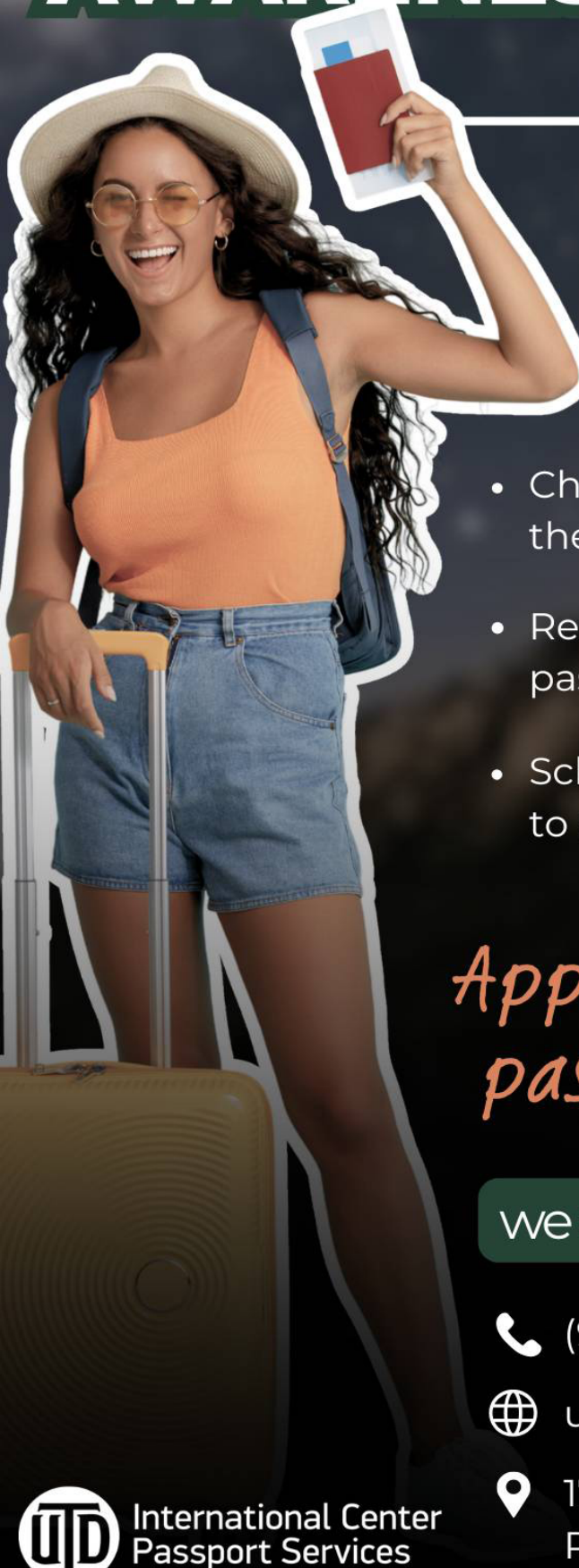
6+ 1	2	3	8× 4
8+ 2	3	4÷ 4	1
3	3- 4	1	2
4 4	1	5+ 2	3

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Need a serene natural getaway? Try the Dallas botanical gardens

The Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens provides respite from urban life amid flowers, pollinators and scenic views

NANDINI SINGH
Life & Arts Editor

Large trees cast over the pathways while young bushes display a scene of various flowers and plants. Learning thrives as young minds ask questions about the different types of flora, and others interact by peacefully looking out to the landscape. Located in the heart of Dallas stands the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, where natures interaction can be found in many forms.

The Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens spans 66 acres and encompasses a total of 19 named gardens. The most notable and popular section, “A Woman’s Garden,” celebrates the “strength, grace, and spirit of women through a blend of formal structure and natural beauty.” The space includes a still pool with a statue of a woman watching over the garden. People can look to the large water body beside the pool, White Rock Lake, capturing both the carefully curated space of the garden as well as the lake that surrounds it.

The gardens as a whole display many forms of flowers and plants with various hues of oranges, pinks, yellows, and fuchsias, with the garden outline designed for interaction. With pathways allowing guests to be within reach of the flower’s individuals are able to see the delicate nature of the flowers alongside the insects, such as bees, that surround them.

While many gardens display resting spaces for those who look to simply observe their surroundings, these gardens invite individuals to remain a part of the environment, wit. Spaces are carefully curated around the gardens, with some benches in a circle form around the bark of a tree and others hidden under the shade of the trees.

The garden moves with the seasons, providing something new every visit. This past summer, the gardens displayed works of art by Seward Johnson,



DALLAS ARBORETUM AND BOTANICAL GARDENS | COURTESY

who is remembered by his sculptures and realism. The works throughout the garden included many notable displays: “Crossing Paths,” a life-sized scene featuring two women chatting on a bench; “Hot Weather,” a young man enjoying an ice-cream in warmer days; and “Captured,” where a young woman sits on a bench reading a India Blake’s book of the same name. Each sculpture is relatable in its simplicity and proximity to visitors.

“It’s easy sometimes to forget the simple things that give us pleasure. If we open our eyes, life is marvelous,” Johnson said. “The human spirit triumphs, if only for moments in a day. I try to have my work call attention to those moments.”

In the garden’s peak seasons, fall and winter, its activities are particularly popular. The fall months display “Autumn at the Arboretum,” showcasing over 100,000 pumpkins and a Pumpkin Village, with huts and houses large enough to walk through. Winter in the gardens plays on winter wonderland imagery with a Christmas Village featuring games for the kids, and the “12 Days of Christmas” displayed in gazebos. The activities, though the same each year, provide a sense of familiarity for many in Dallas.

The gardens are accompanied by a

stone house by the name of The DeGolyer House. Supported by the city of Dallas, the estate represents Mr. and Mrs. Everett DeGolyer’s home, built in 1941. The home celebrates the art of preservation and act as a space for individuals to experience the English-feel of the home, including a large living room filled with cutlery and a grand piano, a tearoom and a library spanning volumes of books.

A classic spot for a picnic, the gardens have large hills that overlook White Rock Lake. Many restaurants, such as Cafe on the Green, which allows for quick bites and refreshments or Restaurant DeGolyer, which stands by the DeGolyer house for lunch, and an adjoining tearoom as homage to its origins.

The Arboretum is open daily from 9am-5pm. An adult ticket is \$21.95 Monday - Thursday and \$25.95 Friday - Sunday (varies by the season). More information can be found on their website. UTD Students may purchase discounted tickets to visit the gardens in the Comet Card Office.

The gardens provide a place for one to seek anything they search for. From a peaceful afternoon for a picnic or to observe the scientific names of the varieties of flowers, it serves as a beacon of the beauty found in nature.



RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

‘Superman’ (2025) rings in a new DC era and a new meaning of ‘punk rock’

The film brings the iconic Superman comics to life with bright colors and recontextualized characters, leaving older DC tropes behind

SHERLYN DOMINGUEZ
Retrograde Staff

“Superman” (2025), directed by James Gunn and released July 11, marks a bold new beginning for the DC Cinematic Universe that will be under Gunn’s supervision moving forward. The movie reintroduces us to a redefined Clark Kent, played by David Corenswet, with a new, less indestructible persona.

In Zack Snyder’s Superman movies, he makes extensive use of a dark color scheme and grade—a darkness that further extends to the overall tone of the films. Snyder’s version of Clark is brooding and mysterious. That dark atmosphere is a far cry from the bright and happy one used in both the traditional Superman comics and its latest film adaptation. The bright color grading helps the iconic blue and red suit stick out even more as we witness Superman’s adventures and energy.

Henry Cavill’s depiction of Superman, starting with “Man of Steel” (2013), has Clark grappling with his identity as a human with demi-

god abilities, ultimately leading to him being disconnected from humankind. Cavill’s Superman is so burdened by his powers that his superhero persona almost entirely erases who he is as Clark. In contrast, Corenswet’s version of Superman is consistently shown to be in touch with his human life. Gunn’s emphasis on Clark’s connection to his job, friends and family all humanize what is a deeply empathetic character — empathy that is most clearly shown in Clark’s willingness to save the people of Jarhanpur from Boravian and Lex Luthor’s attacks.

But that’s not to say “Superman” (2025) doesn’t reckon with the hero’s complex identity. When Luthor reveals a video of his parents saying his objective is to rule over the Earth and to “take as many lives as he can,” xenophobia against him erupts across society. No longer is he the beloved hero of Metropolis, but an alien threat to the U.S.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.



PHOTOS BY VEDANT SAPRA | COURTESY

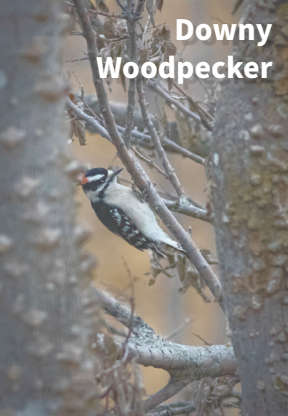
American Goldfinch



House Finch



Mourning Dove



Downy Woodpecker



Blue Jay



Red-tailed Hawk



Carolina Chickadee



Northern Cardinal



American Robin

Vivid pinks and disco balls: Travel through Irving Museum’s queer history gallery

A jewel of color within the museum, the exhibition celebrates, cherishes and mourns the past

MAR OLOGBAN
Staff Writer

Big, bold colors immediately catch the eye upon walking into this vibrant exhibition celebrating LGBTQ+ history and artwork. Upbeat pop music uplifts visitors’ mood compared to the more muted tones throughout the rest of the Irving Museum at its Badge of Pride exhibition, being showcased from June 6 to September 28 with free admission.

For Adrian Cardwell, lead curator of the exhibition, the idea has been one in the making for three decades. Only recently have the pieces fallen into place for the exhibition to come to life.

“We started this project three years ago, and it started when the museum director Jen Landry and I met at the Irving Archive and

Museum, who was also hosting an exhibition at the time,” Cardwell said. “Lots of strong themes and has a direct correlation to today.”

Just outside the main exhibit, memorial quilts stretch across the walls of the exhibit, commemorating the victims of the AIDS crisis. The quilts showcased countless personal stories across decades alongside sharing resources for those who are currently affected by AIDS, going back to a time where the LGBTQ+ community was suffering during the AIDS crisis.

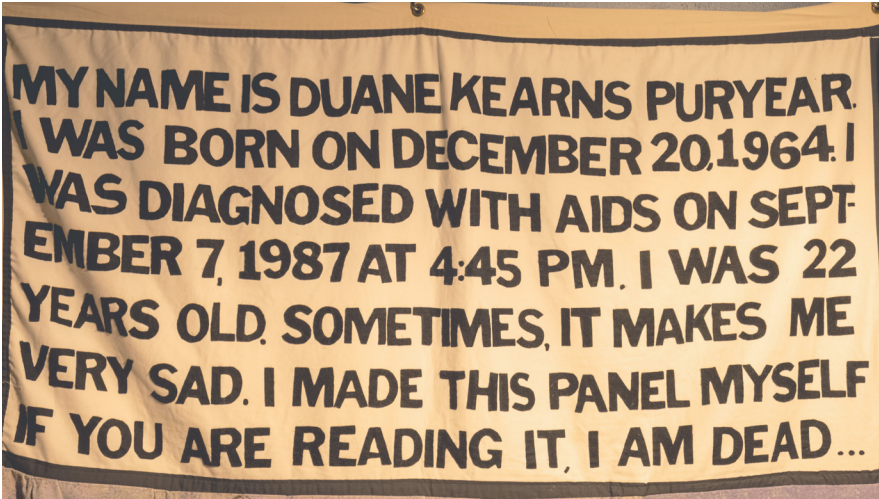
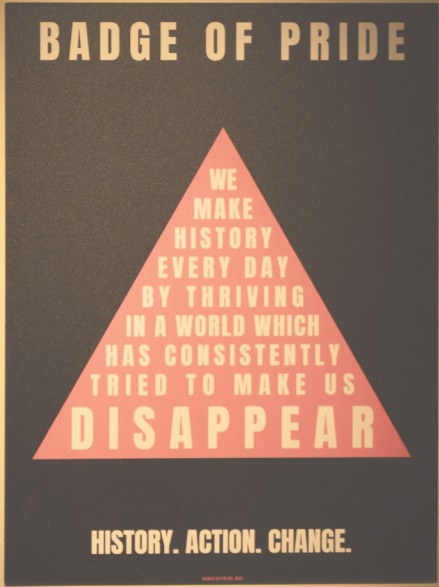
The crisis emerged in the early ’80s and continued on until it was better controlled, but the LGBTQ+ community faced heightened discrimination due to homophobic misinformation that implied only homosexual indi-

viduals could contract the disease. In the ’80s alone, over 100,777 people died from AIDS, largely because of stigma surrounding it. Today, the Irving Museum reckons with that stigma.

“As a community and in this country, we have a lot of uncomfortable truths in our past,” Cardwell said. “We wanted to confront those.”

Walking into the exhibit, the viewer is greeted with a hot pink room with a disco ball, chandeliers and preppy music. The energy is remarkably different from the rest of the museum, visibly brightening the mood of the many who walked the room.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.



PHOTOS BY LYNN CHEN | RETROGRADE STAFF

Top left: A memorial quilt commemorating the life of a victim of the AIDS crisis. Top right: “Lost Faces,” a sketch commemorating Transgender Day of Remembrance. Bottom left: A collection of queer pins and stickers related to the AIDS crisis. Bottom right: A sculpture installation in front of a poster speaking out about the AIDS crisis.



Island survival, Spirit Rocks and Hoblitzelle under fire

Meet your Student Government president and vice president as they sit down to answer your most burning questions



ALEXANDER LAWLESS | RETROGRADE STAFF

President Giana Abraham and Vice President David Baker are pictured above on the grounds of UTD.

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Last spring, over 1,000 students voted in UTD’s Student Government election. *The Retrograde* had the pleasure of speaking to the winners of that election, the 2025-2026 executive officers of Student Government: President Giana Abraham, a neuroscience and psychology double major, and Vice President David Baker, a neuroscience junior. Read on to get to know the humans behind the lofty titles.

Q: What led to you joining Student Government? Have you recovered from that yet?

Abraham: Like most other senators, I wanted to create an impact on campus, making it more connected one conversation at a time. While I may recover from the chaos I have gotten myself into this year, I fear that my email inbox will not.

Baker: My journey with Student

Government started on a whim because I thought it could be cool to represent student interests and create projects and events that would leave a mark on campus. Though I didn’t initially put much effort into running freshman year, I’ve invested hundreds of hours into Student Government and plan to work for hundreds more. (Baker will not recover.)

Q: If given complete control of UTD, what would be your first decree, act or abuse of power?

Abraham: Bring back the Spirit Rocks and create a free parking scheme where we tax the loitering campus geese so those fines can pay for parking spots (and maybe a new parking structure.)

Baker: The first thing I’d do would probably be bringing back the Spirit Rocks. They were one of the first things I saw on campus when I toured, and they serve as a great way to build up the community of UTD.

Q: If you crash landed on an uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean, what would be your Comet Survival Plan™?

Abraham:

- 1) Try to remember what I learned from watching “Survivor.”
- 2) Accept that I have a goldfish memory and focus on gathering coconuts to spell “S.O.S.”
- 3) Enjoy the disconnected island life until someone flies by.

Baker: The first thing I’d do would be to check for any injuries, then find clean drinking water. From there, I’d build a big “S.O.S.” on the beach, find food, shelter and fire.

To read the rest of this story, visit retrogradenews.com.

Want school spirit? Push sports — real sports

UTD needs to deemphasize esports and begin promoting physical sports if it wants to capitalize on the transition to NCAA Division II

MUAAZ ABED
Staff Writer

UTD’s going all in on esports. From billboards proclaiming our state superiority in esports to a new multi-million-dollar esports arena named after an eyeroll-inducing League of Legends pun, UTD has invested millions into hoisting up its esports program to the same level that other universities hold their football teams. As a famously nerdy school, it might make sense that the flagship sports spearheading our school spirit are gaming related. But despite the university having a large gamer population, esports are fundamentally different from traditional sports in ways that make them significantly less effective at propagating school spirit. If we want to build a brighter future for UTD where Comets have pride in our university, the school needs to start prioritizing our physical athletics programs over esports.

The primary issue with relying on esports to provide school spirit is that they are fundamentally digital experiences. Going in-person to a soccer or basketball game is an entirely different experience to watching them on the TV. Hearing the crowd roar as someone scores a goal or makes a layup is something that fills your heart with pride for your team. The same is simply not true for esports. The game you see on the livestream is the exact same game you see in the esports arena, leading to a more insular experience than traditional sports. The incentive isn’t nearly as strong to show up and show out for your team, and as such the atmosphere of excitement tends to be missing. And without excitement, who cares about sports?

Even if esports had the same effect on audiences as traditional sports, another is-



ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

sue facing esports is their declining popularity. Major esports events are reporting record low viewership numbers, illustrating what appears to be a decline in the overall popularity of esports as spectator sports. If our flagship sport is in decline, then how can we expect to see a consistent and sustained growth of our school spirit? Our traditional sports, on the other

hand, are not beholden to popularity trends. Our physical athletics programs have been around for decades and have only been increasing in popularity. Just last year, UTD Athletics began their transition to NCAA Division II, a transition that brings with it increased funding for athletes, athletics programs and athletics advertisements. UTD unfortunately has

been stifling the potential growth brought by the transition, and by proxy our school spirit, through their lack of a clear vision for these programs.

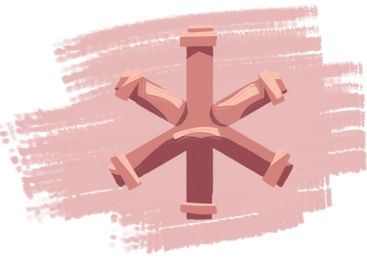
UTD does care to some degree for our traditional sports programs. The university recently bought an ad in Times Square to advertise our athletics programs, and they paid to send our men’s basketball team to

Europe and our golf team to Hawaii. But promotion is lacking where it matters for UTD Athletics. Did you even know we had a school-sponsored golf team before I mentioned it? Probably not. This is an issue that permeates all of UTD’s athletics. With the sole exception of the UTD men’s basketball team, games are almost never advertised to the UTD student body. In my experience going to on-campus soccer games, the only people to show up to games were the immediate friends and family of the players. The majority of the time, the bleachers were predominantly filled by supporters of the visiting team. Our athletics program simply cannot grow unless UTD begins telling people to come to our games.

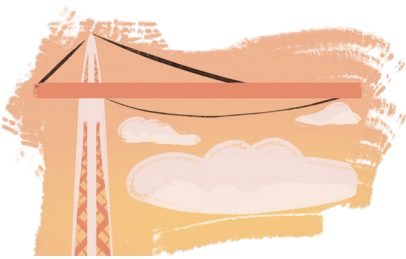
Perhaps the worst thing to come out of UTD’s prioritization of esports over traditional sports are the budget cuts. In May, UTD attempted to cut the track and cross country teams, citing financial issues and budget cuts, just after UTD opened the brand-new \$15 million esports center. In their pursuit to build up the esports programs, UTD has spent millions that potentially could have been used to support other athletics programs that could possibly be more effective in improving UTD’s school spirit.

Beginning this year, UTD Athletics will officially compete in the Lone Star Conference. If UTD fails to capitalize on this moment to bolster traditional sports programs, then we will never escape our reputation for having low school spirit. Until then, support our athletics programs. If you want to see UTD have stronger school spirit, then look up the season schedule for sports you enjoy and make an effort to attend them. At this point, it’s all we can do.

Scavenger hunt: Can you find these common spots during your first week?



LOVE JACK



ENARC



PLINTH



YO Y TÚ



CECIL GREEN BUST

GRAPHICS BY RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Letters from your Student Government representatives

GIANA ABRAHAM
Student Government President

Dear Comets,
Welcome to our campus! My name is Giana Abraham, and it is with immense gratitude that I write to you as your Student Government President for the 2025-26 academic year. Serving this community has been one of my greatest privileges, and every day I am reminded of the power we hold as students — not just to shape our campus, but to shape the world around us.

Beyond the construction and chaos, this campus has a unique charm. Over the next few years, you will form connections that last a lifetime and discover parts of yourself you never knew existed. Seek out discomfort by joining new clubs, starting conversations with people who challenge your perspectives, and embracing every opportunity to grow. These years are your chance to leave a mark. Make it count!

We live in times of both challenge and opportunity. Recent legislation in Texas has had a major impact on students, cutting diversity, equity and inclusion programs and reducing support for underrepresented communities. Academic freedom and student input in shaping campus policies are increasingly restricted, and government oversight of universities has tightened. Meanwhile, federal policies and changing immigration rules have put the futures of international students in the U.S. at risk. Globally, conflicts displace millions, and human rights are under attack, while basic freedoms we once took for granted are being challenged and taken away. It is now more important than ever for us to raise our voices in advocating for inclusion and defending the rights of everyone on campus and in the broader community.

It is our priority to ensure that students are actively involved in pivotal decisions that affect our campus. Recent events, such as the temporary pause of the Track and Field team and the removal of the Spirit Rocks, have revealed just how critical it is for students to have a seat at the table. These moments remind us that change does not happen in isolation. It happens when we stand together to demand transparency and accountability.

Amid these hurdles, including budget cuts, we have adapted to continue supporting the student body and will continue to adapt as new challenges arise this year. As we promised in our campaigns, we are committed to making UTD a more connected and empowering campus. I have the utmost faith in our senators and students, but our work is



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only effective when it intersects with yours.
I encourage every one of you to act: attend a Student Government meeting, register to vote, contact your representatives and stay up-to-date with current news. Your perspectives shape the decisions that impact all of us.
Now more than ever, solidarity matters. In a world that often feels divided and overwhelming, our strength lies in the community that we build together. Whether it’s supporting peers during difficult times, advocating on campus or raising awareness about local and global issues, each small action contributes to a greater momentum that cannot be ignored.
I am inspired daily by the resilience and courage of the students here at UTD. Let us continue to lift each other up and work tirelessly toward the change we wish to see. Together, our voices are stronger than any challenge.
Thank you for entrusting me with this role. I promise to listen, act and represent you with integrity and passion. The future of our campus, and the world we live in, is in our hands. Let’s make it one we can be proud of.

Warmest Whooshes,
Giana Abraham
Student Government President, UTD

DAVID BAKER
Student Government Vice President

Dear UTD student body,
My name is David Baker, and it is with great honor that I have the opportunity to serve as the vice president for the upcoming 2025-2026 school year for Student Government.

We are in the midst of a historic time in the world. A genocide rages in Palestine, the cost of living continues to rise and the rights we thought were ingrained in U.S. law are rapidly eroding. International students face threats of deportation from a government hoping to make them the scapegoat for the problems it perpetuates. Queer students are seeing the erasure of decades of progress and regression towards homophobia and transphobia. With everything happening in the world and domestically, it’s easy to feel powerless and disenfranchised. After all, what can one voice really do?

If used, a lot more than you think.
I have been given an incredible privilege to serve that I will use to benefit the students of UTD to the best of my ability. It is my promise to you that I will work tirelessly to ensure every student at UTD is heard, protected and thrives. While a seemingly daunting task, I know that I, along with the rest of the Student Government Senate, is up for the task. We have never had a better set of senators so willing and ready to fight for every inch. I cannot wait to work with each and every senator to create the safe campus we deserve.

During my campaign last spring, I told you that I want to help bridge the disparate groups on campus together through more large-scale programming. I intend to follow through on that promise. Although the Student Government has received more than \$15,000 of budget cuts, it is my belief that with careful planning and guidance from our executive committee, we will not only be able to deliver the same quality of events and resources that we offered last year, but build on what we have done with new and exciting ideas. I have and will continue to work to ensure every dollar we have is well spent towards quality programming and resources for the student body.

Although the school year is just starting, we have already had attempts to make drastic changes to our campus. Not even a few weeks ago we saw the complete eradication and revival of UTD Track and Field with little to no communication from administration. These shocking changes cannot continue. Earlier this year, I coauthored a resolution to create the sports ad-hoc committee to work on issues faced by sports teams on campus. I plan on continuing my work



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within this committee to figure out what happened and to build a space for student input on these kinds of decisions. For too long students have been left out of these pivotal conversations. Things need to change.
I want to sign off this letter by reemphasizing that the world, Texas and even the campus are in a turbulent state. We live in uncertain times where basic freedoms and norms may be taken away from us in the blink of an eye tomorrow. While I may not be able to directly change the law or policy, I can support, protect and inspire the student body. As I said earlier, it’s easy to feel discouraged. But accepting your fate is giving in to what they want. Individually we may feel like we are just students, but when united together as a campus, we have the ability to create a real change in the world. So go out and let your voice be heard. Protest, write letters and go to public hearings. Texas might have tried to limit our expression through SB 2972 (restrictions on speech at night, during the last weeks of school, etc.) but that will not stop us. Things may be rough now and rougher in the near future, but perseverance and solidarity will pull us through. Together, we can build a better world for each other and those who will follow us.

Thank you,
David Baker
Student Government Vice President, UTD

The Dallas Cowboys don't deserve your viewership in 2025

Different team, same problems

KRISH GANDHI
Staff Writer

Following three straight 12-5 seasons that ended in increasingly agonizing playoff defeats, the wheels completely fell off the Dallas Cowboys in 2024. Despite owner Jerry Jones' claim of being "all-in," the Cowboys made no significant improvements to their roster, leading to a 7-10 record. This spelled the end of the Mike McCarthy era; the head coach who led the Cowboys to their best years since the 1990s dynasty had his contract with the team expire. Now, the fanbase is more discontent than ever, made even worse with hated divisional rival the Philadelphia Eagles winning the Super Bowl while Jones continues to stir up drama. Now, with a new coaching staff, players returning from injury, a promising rookie class and contract disputes, America's Team looks to bounce back, though a path to true contention may not be in the cards. But given their track record, lifelong fans have lost hope that it'll pan out, wondering if it is worth watching another, seemingly inevitable, collapse.

The Cowboys opted to hire from within to fill their head coaching vacancy by promoting offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer. This was not a hire that inspired confidence, and fans took issue with the process. The team had clearly wanted to retain McCarthy, even going as far to block other teams from interviewing him for their openings. Ultimately the team couldn't agree to terms with McCarthy, and hiring Schottenheimer instead of hiring from the outside feels like a panic move. To the team's credit, Schottenheimer was able to assemble a very interesting coaching staff, highlighted by elite defensive mind Matt Eberflus grabbing the defensive coordinator position.

On paper, the Cowboys' offense is a major improvement from last year. In 2023, the Cowboys fielded the #1 scoring offense in the league, led by MVP runner-up quarterback Dak Prescott and Offensive Player of the Year runner-up Ceedee Lamb. Yet, in the 2024 offseason, the team lost future Hall of Fame left tackle Tyron Smith in free agency because of their own cheapness, forcing them to spend a first round pick on Oklahoma University's Tyler Guyton, a raw prospect who struggled in his first season. After a 3-5 start, Dak Prescott missed the rest of the year because of a torn hamstring. The 2025 offseason saw the Cowboys lose another future Hall of Fame offensive lineup, guard Zack Martin, to retirement. Like last year, the Cowboys were forced to spend a first round pick to replace this hole,

grabbing the University of Alabama's Tyler Booker who was 12th overall. Now, Schottenheimer looks to modernize the offense, introducing a heavy pre-snap motion offense alongside new offensive coordinator Klayton Adams, who last year coordinated the third-most efficient rushing attack in the league with the Arizona Cardinals last year. In the team's biggest move of the off-season, they traded for star wide receiver George Pickens from the Pittsburgh Steelers. Pickens will be a fantastic addition, giving Prescott an elite deep threat. This skillset also complements Lamb, who dominates in the intermediate passing game. The team also drafted the University of Texas at Austin's Jaydon Blue in the fifth round, who possesses sub-4.3 speed and has continued to earn reps with the first team in training camp.

Not everything is perfect, however. On July 28, Guyton, who was expected to improve greatly under a new coaching staff, suffered a bone fracture projected to keep him out of action for 4-6 weeks. Thankfully, he avoided an ACL tear that would have knocked him out for the year, but this injury still puts the first few weeks of the regular season in question. Still, if the key players can stay healthy, the offense will be a top 10 unit in the league. They have a

“No matter what, though, the Cowboys will dominate the ratings.”

great quarterback, a top tier wide receiver duo with solid supporting pieces like Pro Bowl tight end Jake Ferguson, a brand new scheme and an offensive line that should be improved.

The Cowboys' defense has a much less positive outlook. They lost longtime contributors in defensive back Jourdan Lewis and defensive lineman Demarcus Lawrence. Last season's breakout star, linebacker Demarvion Overshown, tore his ACL, MCL and PCL in Week 14 and is targeting a return on Thanksgiving. The linebacker core as a whole is a glaring weakness until his return, held together by Marist Liafau, who had a solid end to the season, and free agent signing Jack Sanborn, whose impact



GRACE COWGER | RETROGRADE STAFF

is more of an uncertainty.

The secondary is a similar story. Star cornerback Trevon Diggs underwent knee surgery for a second straight year and his status is in question for the beginning of next season. The team spent a third round pick on East Carolina cornerback Shavon Revel Jr., someone who likely would have been a first round pick if not for a torn ACL last college season; his status for the beginning of the season is also in question. To address these holes, the Cowboys made trades for Tennessee Titans linebacker Kenneth Murray Jr. and Buffalo Bills cornerback Kaiir Elam, two players that have struggled mightily in their careers, making this change feel as effective as fixing your glasses with scotch tape.

Overall, the defensive line is a mixed bag. The edge rusher group is very solid, with superstar Micah Parsons as the highlight. Second round pick Donovan Ezeiruaku joins the supporting rushers of Dante Fowler Jr. (11 sacks last season) and Sam Williams, who is recovering from a torn ACL. The interior is less inspiring. Osa Odighizuwa and his new \$80 million contract is the only reliable asset in the middle. Meanwhile, 2023 first round pick Mazi Smith has had a poor start to his career, and his performance at training camp leaves the fanbase with little hope he will make any significant improvements. The team will have to rely on rookie Jay Toia and United Football League signing Perrion Winfrey to support Odighizuwa.

Unfortunately, like every Dallas Cowboys offseason, there must be some big drama

that dominates the new cycle. This year, it's Micah Parsons' contract dispute with the front office. Parsons' holdout is causing him to miss valuable practice time, meaning he is likely to have a slow start to the season when a deal is eventually signed. With a defense that has so many holes, they need their superstar to carry a massive load on his shoulders. The details of the dispute can get a bit complicated, but the main issue is that team owners Jerry and Stephen Jones refuse to engage with Parsons' agent because they believe Parsons had engaged with Jerry Jones in contract discussions himself. All this has culminated in Parsons announcing on social media that he has requested to be traded from the Dallas Cowboys.

While this sounds really bad, unless Parsons leaves training camp I don't see any reason to think he will actually be traded. Trade requests being used as a leverage tool is not uncommon; the real issue here is that the Cowboys are making the same mistakes they've made before. Last year, both Lamb and Prescott were due for large contract extensions. Instead of signing them early, which would have saved a lot of money, they dragged out the process for no apparent reason, resulting in Lamb holding out until August and Prescott signing his deal literally hours before the first game of the season. They have suffered the consequences of their own mistakes, and this time they messed with one of the most outspoken players in the league. While I do believe that Parsons will eventually sign a well-earned, long-term extension in Dallas, the nauseating fashion in which the Cowboys deal with contract

extensions is just tiring. The fanbase is rightfully bored with all the drama, and there is no reason to believe that it will ever change.

Ultimately, it's unlikely that the Cowboys can seriously contend in 2025. I have no doubt that the offense will put up plenty of points throughout the year, but the defense is not championship caliber. There are just too many holes and too many uncertainties at important positions on that end of the field. If there are massive leaps in development from Mazi Smith, Murray Jr., Elam and Liafau, instant contributions from Ezeiruaku, Toia and Revel, as well as great seasons from Diggs and Overshown coming off of major knee surgeries, the team could certainly contend. But that is a lot that must go perfectly in order to even be considered a legitimate threat. I think the team will win 8-11 games and grab a wild card berth before an early playoff exit.

No matter what, though, the Cowboys will dominate the ratings. They'll have the highest viewed games and the Jones family will smile at the millions of dollars they'll rake in. Unlike other teams in this city, I would not encourage anyone to watch the Cowboys. In this three-decade-long drought of not even making a conference championship, the only thing they have proven to the city is that they do not deserve the benefit of the doubt, and they do not deserve your viewership. I, like millions of other Cowboys fans, will still be there every game day cheering on the team, but the sad truth of what the team has been for my entire life will always be in the back of my mind.

The police don't want you filming them — that's why you should

Why students must know their rights as political tensions escalate, both nationwide and at home

ROHITH RAMAN
Staff Writer

As the mid-summer heat scorches much of the nation, a different kind of pressure is mounting on city streets. From Los Angeles to Dallas, students, political activists and journalists are no longer just subjects of public discussion. They're becoming targets of surveillance, executive intimidation and, in some cases, victims of law enforcement's excessive force. Across the country, including here in Texas, numerous protestors have been arrested, journalists shot with rubber bullets, and students intimidated or silenced, often for doing something as simple as holding up a phone to record the police. We are seeing in real time the effects of ambiguity: when everyone is confused about what the law really means, the people enforcing it start making those decisions for all of us. The question then becomes how these vague laws enable authorities to silence people for exercising their rights.

On June 15, 36 protestors were detained in Los Angeles in just one night for curfew violations, many while documenting excessive police force. One ABC7 reporter was shot with a rubber bullet live on air while filming. Meanwhile, in Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott preemptively deployed the National Guard ahead of the June 14 "No Kings Day" protests, a pushback against state-sanctioned militarism and creeping authoritarianism. As students, many of us assume that our constitutional rights will protect us. We believe that our phones can serve as pillars of accountability and perhaps justice. However, Texas state law paints a far more worrying picture.

Several circuit courts such as the Fifth, Ninth, and Tenth, among other courts, have all ruled in favor of a general right to record police officers while performing their official duties in public spaces. This is

because the specific text of the First Amendment, which protects freedom of speech and of the press, and the Fourth Amendment, which safeguards citizens against unlawful searches and seizures. But Texas law enforcement doesn't always uphold these protections in practice. And recently, neither do campus or municipal police forces.

Texas Penal Code §38.15, for instance, criminalizes anyone who "interrupts, disrupts, impedes or otherwise interferes with" the duties of a public servant on paper. Sounds reasonable, until you realize how malleable that phrase becomes during a protest. Officers have used it to arrest people merely standing nearby with phones. When a bystander is documenting from a sidewalk, holding a phone steady, and still gets cuffed for "criminal interference," the law is ultimately used to protect police from scrutiny, rather than protecting them from harm or physical interference. Officers have used it to arrest people merely standing nearby with phones and have used other laws as pretext to prevent filming. Even at UTD, professor Ali Asgar Alibhai was "violently arrested" while filming a peaceful campus protest, per the lawsuit he filed against the school.

Here at UTD, protecting political expression has lately become a necessity. Whether this means organizing walkouts, painting rocks or rallying against immigration raids, we as students are an integral part of a generation that understands the value of documentation. In fact, many of us have unintentionally become de facto journalists that cover news in real time, often before it even hits the press. But consequently, we also face increased risks. Campus police aren't bound by the same transparency expectations as city departments. Bodycam policies are becoming opaque, arrest records are becoming hard to access and the concept of police



RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

discretionary authority, choosing when to keep their bodycams on or off, has become incredibly vague and broad.

Campus officials and municipal officers are often active manipulators of legal ambiguity. In late 2023, UTD's administration abruptly removed the student-painted Spirit Rocks, which were once a symbol of free expression, citing similar ambiguous "safety concerns." The same tactic is used in policing. When protests heat up, legal ambiguity becomes a legislative safety net to suppress free speech. This makes filming police crucial, because documentation cuts through that ambiguity, creating an undeniable record when law enforcement attempts to change that narrative.

In a world where law enforcement is increasingly equipped with bodycams, drones, facial recognition and AI surveillance, the smartphone remains the last resource available to American civilians. It serves as our way of fighting back. Recordings often deter

misconduct in the moment, since officers know their actions may later be scrutinized by a court, the press or the public. Videos of police encounters have been used as critical evidence in trials and exposed abuses that otherwise might have gone unnoticed.

Multiple federal cases make clear that the right to film exists, but how and when it's exercised can shape whether you walk home or get arrested. Courts across the country have decided on cases such as Glik v. Cuniff (2011), Turner v. Driver (2017), and Fordyce v. City of Seattle (1995), all of which decide that the First Amendment protects our right to record public officials, including the police. Courts have recently held that bystanders cannot interfere with police operations, must stand at a reasonable distance and must not obstruct active investigations. But the definitions of 'reasonable' and 'obstruction' can be manipulated easily, through states like Texas' police-favoring legal system, leaving students as

collateral damage when police scramble to hide their actions.

You have the right to record public officials in public spaces, including police officers performing their duties, just as long as you are not "interfering" with their work. You do not need consent to film these interactions, and authorities cannot legally force you to delete your footage without a warrant, due to Fourth Amendment restrictions. On a college campus, these rights still apply, but campus administrators may interpret what counts as "interference," which can then affect how these rights are enforced in practice.

While we can't change state law overnight, we can resist through knowledge, education and a refusal to be silenced by selective enforcement. We can write, record, speak and hold our police, campus security and university leadership accountable, because, when the camera becomes a threat, that's when we know it is doing its job.

Dear Moghe: Benson didn't listen to us. We hope you do.

The job of a university president, especially for a public university accountable to the Texas state legislature, is not one we envy. You are expected to please a diverse range of stakeholders, meaning your students and faculty are not the only people scrutinizing your actions under a microscope. Considering how the advisory committee for your hiring only contained one active student and one alum, we may not even be the most important group for you to please. Of course, this is not a reflection on you personally, but it sets a concerning tone as your term begins.

As UTD's representative before the UT System's Board of Regents and university donors, you will have to strike the delicate balance between student, faculty and staff interests against those of wealthy donors and the Republican state government. We understand these political realities, and we know that compromise is the name of the game, but when push comes to shove, we'd rather not see student voices get erased.

In more specific terms, you are joining our community in a moment where it seems to have fractured, with administration on one side and students on the other. But if you're ready to listen to our concerns and welcome student voices, we could become a campus that is better: a campus that doesn't mass-fire journalists, doesn't violently arrest its own students and faculty and allows students to protest, research and express themselves without fear of punishment.

You have a celebrated record for increasing research funding as executive vice president for academic affairs at Rutgers University. For UTD, a school heavily focused on research, that accomplishment is of course a great notch on your belt. In the past year, universities across the U.S. have seen their research funding take a major hit — something our campus experienced firsthand according to outgoing president Richard Benson. UTD needs someone who is going to advocate fiercely for researchers to continue receiving the resources they need as grants dry up or become infinitely more competitive, and we have high hopes that you will be up to the task.

Simultaneously, we want to recognize that while grants, prestige and accolades are important, they are only one of a university's many responsibilities. Just as important to keep in mind is the responsibility you have towards staff and faculty, the people who keep this place up and running.

At your previous university, a hiring freeze on part-time lecturers effectively cut 300 adjunct positions, a decision described by faculty members as "thoughtless and callous." The freeze acted as if these adjunct professors were nothing more than "data points on a spreadsheet" instead of real people whose contributions were essential for the academic operations of a university. Not long after, thousands of academic workers at Rutgers went on strike to demand better pay, more security and recognition for the labor they put in during the pandemic. At least in New Jersey the staff and faculty had the ability to strike, a right that is specifically banned

by Section 617.003 of the Texas Government Code. We don't bring this up to be cynical — tough decisions have to be made when running a large university — but already there is the potential for such dilemmas to be mirrored at UTD, this time with even less ability for faculty and staff to stand up for themselves.

Multiple attendees to the January town hall meeting hosted as part of UTD's presidential search spoke about the school's "crumbling institutional support structure," calling for a president who would hire more staff to better support the needs of our student population, our campus facilities and our overstressed and understaffed offices. We want to see our campus thrive. We want more research, more innovation, more opportunities for national recognition so that UTD's talented community gets the appreciation it deserves. We do not want that growth to come at the expense of staff, faculty or the maintenance of valuable programs.

We have already seen the effects of such misalign-

ment who wish to see our university continue to invest in the athletic futures of current students, but it never should have come to that point. The decision itself came without warning and held the potential to uproot the lives of countless students who had made specific plans around years of collegiate-level competition. The fact that a decision of this scale could happen so quickly, without warning and with so little transparency, is deeply concerning. The students affected by decisions like this need a larger voice in the process, or at least some sort of notice in advance that such discussions are on the table.

Yes, sometimes things need to be cut, and yes, some programs will benefit at the expense of others. As we understand it, that remains one of the more thankless aspects of your job. Yet, that difficulty in and of itself does not mean the best solution is to hide from us, the students affected by your decisions. Expansion and growth themselves are not the problem, but they are

ing forward as the state legislature continues to constrict Texas higher education. It is one thing to follow the law, and it is an entirely separate thing to overcomply and take away perfectly legal programs from students. In one academic year, UTD went from having a nationally-recognized gender center and multicultural center under the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to remnants of ODEI under the new OCRS; today we don't even have an official office that houses the legal vestiges of these programs.

This semester is starting under the long shadow of the 89th legislature's SB 37, which has led to the UT system restricting campus speech in terms we consider an infringement upon First Amendment free expression. We urge you not to continue the precedent of overcompliance set by your predecessor — a man who called law enforcement on peaceful protestors, had nine students and three faculty members arrested and is currently listed as a defendant in an ongoing lawsuit regarding one such arrest.

This semester, things are looking bleak. Your term will begin with no convocation speech, a dissolved Academic Senate — meaning faculty no longer has a unified voice with which to speak to administration — and the removal of all news distribution kiosks on campus, affecting our newspaper as well as local circulations like the *Dallas Observer*. Bad start.

We understand it's a tough line to walk. You're starting a new position and you might not want to make waves or cause the university to lose face, but while that point of view is understandable, it only makes sense as long as you think of us as a liability rather than a strength. We as students may not be the most powerful group vying for you to do or say certain things, but as the future of the university, as those creating and consuming the fruits of an active campus, we are the most important.

The existence of *The Retrograde* proves we don't need administrative approval to wield a voice. This publication could be placed within a timeline of a campus civil war that started with the removal of the Spirit Rocks — a move by the prior administration signalling that their ideal form of student expression is done through channels they can control. It was shocking and disheartening, but not crushing. Clearly, we are capable of creating avenues of expression in spite of attempts to control or quiet us. Whether you listen to us or not, we will continue to speak. It is up to you to listen.

We aren't asking you to break the law, but we are asking you not to sacrifice us for it. Take us into account when the state government imposes upon our freedoms. Stand with us, stand up for us. In this moment when it can feel like academia itself is under attack, you have a golden opportunity. The relationship between administration and students at UTD can be redefined not as one of opposition, but in terms of how we can — together — serve the larger community through innovation and productive conversations. We hope you

“ We aren't asking you to break the law, but we are asking you not to sacrifice us for it. Take us into account when the state government imposes upon our freedoms. Stand with us, stand up for us. In this moment when it can feel like academia itself is under attack, you have a golden opportunity to redefine the relationship between students and administration into something other than one of opposition. We hope you will take that chance with us. ”

ment as students and faculty have criticized our campus' much-touted "growth" for prioritizing the appearance of progress over campus facilities and existing programs. For example, take the new multi-million dollar esports center, a state-of-the-art building whose cost and opulence juxtapose the recent attempt to dissolve our track and field team because "budgetary constraints." The school has the funds to build beautiful museums and gaming facilities, but we somehow forgot to allocate enough money for students to participate in sports they were recruited for — all while we tout our big leap into NCAA Division II sports. Cutting track and field weeks before the semester began understandably sparked widespread backlash causing alumni to circulate a petition asking for its reversal, and while this request was granted — a level of responsiveness that we commend and hope to see moving forward — it is a temporary fix for bigger, more systemic issues..

We are happy to see a strong and vocal alumni com-

all for naught if those on campus — whether they be students, staff, or faculty — are treated like pawns on a chessboard, liable to be moved around and sacrificed at will.

From here, we move from concerns to demands. There have been choices made and avenues taken by your predecessor that should not be carried forward.

Last year, due to the changes imposed upon Texas universities by the passage of the 88th legislature's SB 17, UTD saw an entire department replaced and then completely closed. The sudden closure of the Office of Campus Resources and Support, less than one semester into its existence, led to 20 staff members losing their jobs, walking back a prior claim by president Benson that "no one is going to lose a job." That is 20 people who lost their livelihoods and over 30,000 students who lost valuable services. That is the cost of capitulation, and though the blame cannot be placed on any one party, it is the specter of this loss that haunts us mov-

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